

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

Method and Arrangement for Adapting the Lateral and Temporal Resolution of a Microscope Image

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CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This invention claims priority of a German patent application DE 100 31 746.4 filed June 29, 2000 which is incorporated by reference herein.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

10 [0002] The invention concerns a method for adapting the lateral and temporal resolution of a microscope image.
[0003] The method furthermore concerns an arrangement for adapting the lateral and temporal resolution of a microscope image.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] Optical-light image producers such as, for example, microscopes generate the image results in two dimensions and without a time delay. It is a conventional procedure that the sensed images are converted into electronic signals for the purpose of additional analog or digital processing. In this context, an additional limitation in lateral and/or temporal terms occurs because of the limited transmission bandwidth. This limitation occurs in particular in the context of long transmission pathways (telemicroscopy) or low-bandwidth transmission channels.
[0005] The user has, in this context, the opportunity to choose between high lateral resolution and a high image frequency.
25 [0006] US Patent 5,216,596 discloses a telepathology system. A workstation is set up at a remote location and receives images from a preparation (tissue) that is being examined with a microscope. The microscope images are recorded with a conventional video camera, and displayed at the remote location on a conventional video monitor. A

digitization or coding of the image data is accomplished after imaging. The system presented here is tied to analog transmission links, and cannot achieve the necessary resolution in a conventional digital network.

[0007] The system exhibits no capability for reducing corresponding resolutions so as
5 thereby to allow adaptation to the presently available bandwidth.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] It is the object of the invention to create a method that performs the switchover between different operating modes (still-image or video conferencing) in
10 user-friendly fashion.

[0009] This object is achieved by a method which is characterized by the following steps:

- a) detecting changes in the currently transmitted image window by way of changes in the settings of the microscope;
- b) switching over to a transmission mode for video conferencing;
- c) recording the time that has elapsed since the last change in the settings of the microscope; and
- d) switching over to the transmission mode for still images when a certain time limit is exceeded.

15 [0010] A further object of the invention is to create an arrangement that optimally utilizes and adapts the available bandwidth of the transmission channels without requiring user inputs for that purpose.

[0011] This object is achieved by an arrangement which is characterized in that

- means for detecting the changes in the image content of a microscopic image;
- electronic means for limiting the image content on the basis of the data supplied by the means for detecting the change in the image content; and
- means for automatically switching over to the transmission mode suitable for the detected changes in the image content

are provided.

[0012] An advantage of the invention is that after the build-up of an image that remains for a long period, no image refreshing is necessary. In this case the available bandwidth of the transmission channels can be fully utilized, and the image sensed by the microscope can be observed by a user at the remotely located station with the best resolution. If the user then wants to move to a different point in the preparation, he or she can also do this, for example, from the remote station. For that purpose, he or she can correspondingly adapt imaging parameters such as, for example, magnification, focus, and/or position of the X-Y stage. Another possibility is for the microscope parameters to be modified manually, and for corresponding means which detect that change to be provided at the microscope's location. In the case of an automatic microscope, the arrangement can ascertain those changes and then switch over automatically to a different transmission mode that is preferentially adapted to the bandwidth of the network used for transmission.

[0013] As soon as manipulations of the specimen (preparation) or the imaging system of the microscope are performed (for example, a change in the imaging scale or imaged area), the bandwidth necessary for a rapid image transmission rate at high resolution is not sufficient. To achieve higher image frequencies for this period of time, some of the lateral and/or chromatic resolution is simultaneously sacrificed for a short time. The arrangement is automatically switched over to a different transmission mode as a function of the input image (the image sensed by the microscope).

[0014] The transmission mode having the greatest possible lateral and chromatic specimen fidelity is referred to as "still-image" transmission. The mode with limited lateral and/or chromatic resolution is referred to as "video conferencing."

[0015] The switchover between still-image transmission and video conferencing takes place automatically on the basis of the detection of specimen movement or a change in instrument settings.

[0016] This detection takes place as follows:

- In the case of motor-controlled movements, the movement is reported by the controlling system.
- In the case of manual specimen displacement, a measurement system detects the change.

5 • The electronic signals of the image are analyzed for any change in content.

[0017] If a change is identified by one of the aforesaid methods, the transmission system switches over to the "video conferencing" mode (rapid image frequency).

[0018] If the image content remains unchanged for a defined period of time, a switchover occurs to the "still-image" mode (high resolution). The defined period of time

10 can be a specific time interval that can be installed in a timer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019] The subject matter of the invention is depicted in the drawings and will be described below with reference to the Figures, in which:

15 FIG. 1 schematically depicts a system in which the invention is used;

FIG. 2 schematically depicts the arrangement which makes possible switchover between the individual transmission modes in the context of a manual microscope; and

FIG. 3 schematically depicts the arrangement which makes possible switchover 20 between the individual transmission modes in the context of an automatic microscope.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] System 1 depicted in FIG. 1 comprises a microscope 2 that is set up at a location where preparations (tissue sections) for examination are being produced. The location is usually a histology or pathology department of a hospital. A first computer 4 having a monitor 5 is associated with microscope 2. A second computer 6, also having a monitor 7, is connected to first computer 4 via a conventional network 8. The network is

represented in FIG. 1 by a connecting line having an interruption 8a, the better to illustrate that second computer 6 can in principle be installed at any desired distance from first computer 4.

[0021] In the exemplary embodiment depicted here, microscope 2 is configured as an
5 automatic microscope. All the imaging parameters of microscope 2 can be set and modified, for example, from second computer 6. In this case microscope 2 possesses corresponding motors for setting the parameters. FIG. 1 depicts a motor 10 that makes possible displacement of an X-Y stage 12. Motors for changing the imaging scale, moving X-Y stage 12 in the Z direction, and/or focusing are not depicted for reasons of
10 clarity. The arrangement and use of these motors is, however, evident to one skilled in the art.

[0022] A specimen slide 14, with a prepared preparation 14a on it, is placed on X-Y stage 12. Depending on the selected magnification, an image window (not depicted) is imaged and is recorded by a camera 16. Camera 16 can be configured as a conventional
15 video camera or digital camera. Camera 16 is connected via a connection 17 to first computer 4. A further connection 18, over which control signals are sent to the corresponding motors, exists between first computer 4 and microscope 2. The control signals are conveyed via network 8 from second computer 6 to first computer 4. Image data are similarly conveyed via network 8 from first computer 4 to second computer 6.
20 The two computers 4 and 6 can each be equipped with a modem 11 or another remote data transmission system that serves to establish a connection. An input unit 20 for user inputs is also connected to each computer 4 and 6. Input unit 20 can be configured as a mouse, keyboard, or voice control unit.

[0023] As already mentioned above, first computer 4 generally serves to sense the
25 image data of microscope 2 and convert them into a corresponding data format for transfer via network 8. A compression of the image data can also be performed by first computer 4. In addition, microscope 2 is also equipped with position sensors (not depicted) which supply to first computer 4 signals that furnish information about the X,

Y, and Z positions of X-Y stage 12. First computer 4 is also responsible for receiving data from second computer 6 to control microscope 2, and for converting them into corresponding control signals.

[0024] FIG. 2 is a schematic depiction of an arrangement 21 that makes possible the
5 switchover between the individual transmission modes in the context of a manual
microscope. As already mentioned above, a purely manual microscope 2 ascertains
changes in the microscope settings by way of the sensed image contents. Arrangement 21
comprises an image data processing means 22, a buffer memory 24, a comparison
element 26, a timer 19, and a switchover means 23. Image data processing means 22
10 receives an input image from the camera. For that purpose, for example, salient image
points and their positions within a defined image window (not depicted) are ascertained.
These data are conveyed to buffer memory 24. Buffer memory 24 is subdivided into a
first and second part 24₁ and 24₂. The data of a previous image are stored in first part 24₁,
and the data of the current image are stored in second part 24₂. The data of the current
15 and previous images are compared in comparison element 26, taking into account a time
interval predefined by timer 19. If no deviations are identified in comparison element 26,
a signal to continue transmitting a still image is sent via a first output 25₁ of arrangement
20. In the event of a deviation, a signal is sent to the switchover means indicating that the
image data of the input image are thereupon to be reduced in accordance with the
20 bandwidth and the transmission rate, in order to generate a live image for video
conferencing. The live image is output via a second output 25₂ of arrangement 20.

[0025] FIG. 3 is a schematic depiction of an arrangement 30 that makes possible the
switchover between the individual transmission modes in the context of an automatic
microscope 2. Arrangement 30 comprises a position data processing means 32, a buffer
25 memory 34, a comparison element 36, a timer 31, and a switchover means 33. Position
data processing means 32 possesses multiple inputs 32₁, 32₂, 32_n which supply signals
regarding the position of X-Y stage 12, magnification, and focus. After processing, these
data are representative of the position of an image window. These data are conveyed to

buffer memory 34. The data of the current and previous image which are stored in buffer memory 34 are compared in comparison element 36, taking into account a time interval predefined by timer 31. If no deviations are identified in comparison element 36, a signal to continue transmitting a still image (or to indicate that no further transmission of a still image is necessary) is sent via a first output 35₁ of arrangement 30. In the event of a deviation, a signal is sent to switchover means 33 indicating that the image data of the input image are thereupon to be reduced in accordance with the bandwidth and the transmission rate, in order to generate a live image for video conferencing. The live image is output via a second output 35₂ of arrangement 30.

10 [0026] The invention has been described with reference to a particular embodiment. It is nevertheless self-evident that changes and modifications can be made without thereby leaving the range of protection of the claims recited hereinafter.

PARTS LIST

15	2	Microscope
	4	First computer
	5	Monitor
	6	Second computer
	7	Monitor
20	8	Network
	10	Motor
	11	Modem
	12	X-Y stage
	14	Specimen slide
25	14a	Preparation
	16	Camera
	17	Connection
	18	Connection

- 19 Input unit
- 20 Arrangement
- 21 Timer
- 22 Image data processing means
- 5 23 Switchover means
- 24 Buffer memory
- 24₁ Buffer memory, first part
- 24₂ Buffer memory, second part
- 25₁ First output
- 10 25₂ Second output
- 30 Arrangement
- 31 Timer
- 32 Position data processing means
- 32₁, 32₂, 32_n Multiple inputs
- 15 33 Switchover means
- 34 Buffer memory
- 35₁ First output
- 35₂ Second output
- 36 Comparison element